

REVIEW ARTICLE

CORNISH CASES AND CORNISH SOCIAL HISTORY

John Rule, *Cornish Cases: Essays in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Social History*. Southampton: Clio Publishing, 2006, 294 pp., illustrations, ISBN 0-9542650-8-4

In 2002 the publication of Mark Stoye's *West Britons* was hailed as an exemplar of the 'new Cornish historiography'.¹ *West Britons* collected together a series of articles previously published in various academic journals and added a couple of new essays. As a result Stoye's important work became more accessible to a wider public. It also adroitly staked a claim for the Cornish experience of the early modern period, between 1485 and the eighteenth century, to be taken seriously as a fit component of the 'New British History'.

Late in 2006 another collection of reprinted and previously unpublished essays appeared which at first glance offered the potential to do for the period from 1700 to 1870 what *West Britons* did for earlier centuries. John Rule has been a prolific historian of the social life of England and a good proportion of his work is based on Cornish empirical material. This reflects the fact that his thesis, completed in 1971, explored the lives of Cornish miners and their communities in the period when Cornwall led the world in metal mining and when up to a third of its labour force obtained their living directly from the mines.² The non-appearance of John Rule's thesis in the form of a published monograph must rank as one of the most regrettable losses of Cornish historical literature.³ Nonetheless, much of the argument of that thesis has re-surfaced over the years in various academic journals and edited collections of conference papers. It is these that are brought together in *Cornish Cases*.

The doctoral genesis of this book, now more than a generation ago, indicates that caution is in order if we wish to view *Cornish Cases* as an example of the 'new Cornish historiography'. On the one hand Roger Burt claims in a typically provocative foreword to this book that John Rule is a 'progenitor of what is now seen as the "new Cornish historiography"'.⁴ Yet both Burt and, to a lesser extent, Rule appear to base their understanding of the 'new Cornish historiography' solely on the calls from a decade and a half ago to make the study of Cornish 'difference' the *raison d'être* of Cornish Studies.⁵ The parallel aim of setting Cornish history in context and placing it in a comparative framework seems to have been ignored by Roger Burt in his foreword.⁶ There, he rightly states that to understand Cornwall it is necessary to see its uniqueness from a perspective that encompasses other unique and special localities in order to give it a comparative meaning. However, he then proceeds to make the more arguable assertion that 'greater benefits ... can be derived from the very act of stepping beyond the county into the great national and international centres of learning'.⁷ In a more measured way John Rule brings a perspective gained from his career at one of those centres of learning - Southampton - to suggest the limitations of the 'new Cornish historiography'. He glosses the latter as importing the methods and subjects familiar to other historians and adopting an explicit inter-disciplinarity and theoretical stance.⁸ However, this bare summary misses the ongoing discussion, and it might be said criticism, that has taken place

within the Cornish Studies field around the ‘new Cornish historiography’ and our approach to understanding the past in Cornwall.⁹ For instance, in 2002 I called for, among other things, a greater focus on micro-history in Cornish history.¹⁰ It is perhaps here that the potential of John Rule’s work becomes plain. For, as Roger Burt observes, it can be seen as an example of that micro-history, firmly tied to a close reading of the sources but using them to draw out generalisations of greater relevance grounded in the comparative academic literature.

Anyone expecting this book to do for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries what *West Britons* did for the sixteenth and seventeenth and provide an off-the-shelf manifesto for the new Cornish history of those centuries will be disappointed. Most of the essays here were originally published around a decade ago and even those published here for the first time seem from their references to have been composed in the mid-1990s. As such, much will be familiar to anyone who has made a serious study of eighteenth and nineteenth century Cornwall. However, in his introductory chapter, John Rule does engage directly with the ‘new Cornish historiography’. But he does so from a critical position consciously outside it. I have suggested elsewhere that a key feature of the new Cornish Studies more generally was a normative stance that views Cornwall and its people as suitable subjects of study in their own right and, furthermore, accepts the importance of a Cornish standpoint on knowledge.¹¹ While providing many insights into the Cornish past *Cornish Cases* is not an example of this. Unlike Mark Stoye’s enthusiastic embrace of the ‘new Cornish historiography’, John Rule remains more sceptical, slightly suspicious of what he concludes is its overarching purpose - a search for difference. Nonetheless, I shall return to this aspect at the end of this review article and suggest that while personally somewhat reluctant to be co-opted into the ‘new Cornish historiography’, Rule’s work contains a number of aspects that are of major relevance to the new Cornish history.

That said, this collection conveniently draws John Rule’s important body of work on Cornish subjects together in one place. More importantly, it raises issues and analogies that practitioners of Cornish history might fruitfully pursue. As I shall argue, both the ‘new Cornish historiography’ and the social history tradition in which John Rule’s earlier work was located can be seen to have their limitations. However, this book implicitly provides a map with which we can find our way to a more nuanced historical approach that transcends those limitations and prefigures the potential shape of Cornish history.

In the rest of this review article I intend first to put John Rule’s work in the context of the disintegration of the ‘traditional’ British social history of the 1960s and 70s from which it emerged and the changes that have taken place in that sub-discipline since the 1980s. I then summarise the content of the book and discuss some of the lessons it holds for historians of eighteenth and nineteenth century Cornwall. Finally, I review its implications for the new Cornish history, where it offers a potential route away from a ‘historiography’ dominated by the events of the early modern period and towards a more inclusive Cornish history.

Returning to the roots: the British social history

In his introductory chapter John Rule returns to his roots. First, he revisits the influence on his work of E.P. Thompson, his doctorate supervisor at Warwick in the late 1960s. Thompson was both the inspiration and the most accomplished

practitioner of a school of social history that emerged in 1960s Britain. These historians set out to discover more about the lives of working people and understand their political activities. They were themselves often the sons (though not at this stage the daughters) of working class parents who, with the expansion of the British university system in Harold Wilson's Britain, saw the citadels of privilege that had jealously guarded the gates of academia begin to crumble. Seizing this opportunity they set about with a will to, in Thompson's words, rescue their class from 'the enormous condescension of posterity' that had previously characterised a history dominated by high politics and the ruling elite.

The majority of British social historians of the 60s and 70s shared a set of assumptions about the centrality of material facts in explaining social changes and about the importance of social conditions conditioning workers' experiences. Those experiences produced social classes. Even non-marxist historians adopted a vaguely determinist perspective and took the existence of social classes and their creation during the industrial revolution for granted.¹² Debate revolved around the extent of class consciousness, the timing of its appearance and the delineation of the resulting class structure rather than around the existence of class as the main structure constraining and conditioning the lives of people in Victorian Britain.

However, in the 1980s, reflecting the turn to individualism and conservatism in contemporary politics and the emergence of new feminist and poststructuralist theories both the methods and assumptions of British social history began to come under sustained attack.¹³ Gareth Stedman Jones initiated a growing chorus of dissension. Class was not, he argued, just a social phenomenon rooted in material conditions, but a question of culture and to a large extent a linguistic creation. This was taken further by historians such as Patrick Joyce and James Vernon in the 1990s, who viewed class as an ideological and discursive construct and one that was not in fact central to the world view of those living through the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Despite a vigorous counter-attack by marxist social historians, the centrality of class in historical accounts of the nineteenth century began to weaken and dissolve as historians turned to more cultural approaches to explain the lives of working people and away from a fixation on the history of political movements and trade unionism, the staples of the labour history that had emerged as a sub-genre of the British social history.¹⁵

By 1993 even Thompson himself was admitting that class was 'a concept long past its sell-by date'.¹⁶ The bitter disputes of the 1980s and early 1990s have now died away leaving a social history landscape where narratives, consumption and complex plural identities have replaced a single-minded focus on class as the primary social identity of everyday life. The content of social history has in consequence widened as attention has shifted away from the workplace and from class as the principal explanatory factor in discussing topics such as family life, education, leisure or religion. That does not mean that class and the role of material conditions have entirely disappeared. The more recent contributions of British social historians may argue for multiple and more contingent identities but these include narratives of class, and class can still be seen as key identity at certain times and in certain places.¹⁷

John Rule avoided the frenetic and sometimes heated debates of the 1980s about the nature of social history, preferring to continue his work documenting the lives of

working people from the archives, building on his Cornish thesis to become a respected social historian of the eighteenth century whose remit included the whole of England and whose interests ranged from crime to the history of the fishing industry.¹⁸ In the course of this, his work retained the tenor of Thompson's approach, adopting the latter's 'socialist humanism' while rejecting the strict economic determinism of more doctrinaire marxists. This career is recounted in the first part of the introductory chapter to this collection, where a historical approach grounded in a thorough engagement with evidence and combined with a close reading of the texts, with at times 'attentive disbelief', is re-affirmed and the postmodernist critique of history firmly but politely rejected.¹⁹ While accepting the need for studies of identities other than class Rule's position remains one that views social consciousness as arising out of lived experience. But, as most of the essays in this volume were written more than ten years ago, they inevitably reflect an earlier more unambiguously Thompsonian perspective and can be read as examples of that influential 'Warwick School' of British social history.

While in that sense an affirmation and confirmation of his Thompsonian roots the volume marks a return to another set of roots. In the second part of the introduction John Rule returns to his Cornish family roots with a disarming account of his own family background in Redruth. With grandparents and great grandparents born in Redruth, St Just, Helston, St Day and Truro among other places, and with the inevitable examples of emigration in his family story, he firmly establishes his Cornish voice, grounded in the communities of west Cornwall. It is those communities and the lives of those who struggled to live, work and survive among the burrows and engine houses of the west that have been the principal subjects of John Rule's historical research on Cornwall.

The Rule thesis: quietism and its causes

Baldly stated, the marxist historiographical tradition foregrounds the link between the economy on the one hand and social movements and cultural knowledge on the other, The former determines the latter, even though that determination may be indirect and 'in the last resort'. Given that, for a marxist, the economic organisation of any society is explained by the struggle between classes, its social and cultural superstructure can always be read off from its economic base. Thus in a feudal society, the dominant class is composed of landlords who exploit the peasantry. The religious, legal and administrative structures of such a society work in the interests of landlords and combine to oppress the peasantry. Similarly, in a capitalist society the levers of the economy are reserved for the capitalist class, who in their search to maximise profits, exploit the working class. Education, media, religion and other social and cultural aspects ultimately serve the interests of capitalism and its ruling class. This admittedly gross over-simplification of marxism is the tradition out of which Thompsonian social history grew, although that social history tradition gave considerable agency to the working class in creating their own institutions and culture.

Such a model brings its own set of predictions. If the economy is governed by capitalist precepts then workers will ultimately generate a consciousness of themselves as an exploited class. This will lead to the organisation of political parties and trade unions through which they will protest their working and living conditions. Labour institutions are thus the inevitable outcomes of the social experience of labour. The centrality of class to a marxist interpretation resulted in an over-fixation by

British social historians on one central issue - the rise of unions and the Labour Party. For a marxist, as capitalism matured, the emergence of unions and socialism would be the expected by-product. As Britain was the world's first industrial society then it should also, logically, contain the strongest and most advanced workers' organisations. But it did not, a problem that marxist historians then spent much time trying to explain.

The socialist humanism of E.P. Thompson and John Rule meant that they investigated a wider range of social phenomenon than just labour organisation, including crime, leisure and religion. Moreover, their commitment to an empiricist methodology tempered the teleology of the marxist model. Yet there is still a sense in John Rule's work that the counter-factual question of why labour organisation did not conform to the pattern predicted by marxism is an important issue that requires examining. Thus, much of John Rule's writings on Cornwall focused on the issue of why Cornish miners, despite being one of the oldest and most well-established of the UK's industrial communities in the early nineteenth century, did not generate their own trade unions or get involved in early political movements such as Chartism.

For example, chapter 9 of *Cornish Cases* explains the failure of the two Chartist missionaries to Cornwall in 1839 – Robert Lowery and Abram Duncan - to tap support for the People's Charter among the miners. Miners were 'too conservative' and too committed to a 'prior political economy', a 'moral economy' which blamed middlemen and merchants rather than their employers at times of penury. This 'moral economy' included regular and uncommonly large food riots led by miners at times of high prices, but the focus remained on high prices rather than low wages. Chapter 2 describes the food rioting that was endemic in Cornwall from 1727 to 1847 and is a valuable addition to the literature, not previously published although much of the empirical material can be found in John Rule's 1971 thesis. Rule concludes that food riots in Cornwall triggered some of the largest crowd actions anywhere in Britain and were an example of the miners constituting a separate community. Food riots continued later in Cornwall than elsewhere because they were effective in achieving their aims and because the older 'moral economy' (as opposed to the new-fangled market economy) remained a powerful concept.

Nonetheless, despite their predilection for noisy 'riot' (although in reality food riots had become highly ritualistic and relatively disciplined affairs by the 1780s) John Rule still describes the society of which they were part as 'quietist'. His key argument is found in Chapter 10, first published in 1992, on the 'configuration of quietism'. Cornish miners are described as 'quietist' not because they were particularly quiet but because they did not get involved in trade unionism, Chartism or strike action, as might be expected from a marxist perspective. Rejecting a single cause explanation, in this article Rule brings together a number of factors in a multiple-cause explanation, seeing quietism as the outcome of a 'cumulative impact of a number of factors'. Nevertheless, the Rule thesis both in this chapter and elsewhere in *Cornish Cases* gives special attention to two factors. The first was the labour organisation of the mining industry and the second the role of Methodism.

Chapter 4 investigates why tributing was held by contemporary mid-nineteenth century observers to be the 'perfect wage system', producing an ordered workforce free from the taint of unions and strikes that disfigured other industrial communities.

Its main effect, according to John Rule, was the disappearance of the employer and the absence of a boss-class, something that slowed the development of class consciousness.²⁰ While re-asserting the centrality of tributing in the experience of mining communities Rule does however provide evidence that it was not as competitive and perfect as contemporaries claimed. ‘Imperfect’ practices such as collusion in bidding for working pitches, ‘kitting’ or mixing ore from different pitches, and ore stealing are documented and may be the tip of an iceberg of fraud more characteristic of the actual working of the system.

This wage system combined with a second factor, the domination of Methodism, to hold back Cornish miners’ class consciousness. Three of the chapters in this book are centrally concerned with the role of Methodism in the mining communities. Chapter 3 argues that Methodism was a folk religion that provided real solace and consolation for the community. This was its negative effect, diverting potential protest over exploitation and high mortality into issues of personal redemption. Personal redemption took on a collective aspect when multitudes were ‘saved’ at the same time. Periodic mass revivals were the means through which Methodism in Cornwall gained membership from the 1780s through to the 1860s with the greatest revivals in 1799 and 1814 transforming Methodism from a minority sect into the dominant denomination of Cornish religious life. Chapter 6 argues that revivals are best explained not by exogenous factors such as war, pestilence or high food prices but from the internal dynamic of local religious culture. Rule here closely follows the argument of David Luker who places Methodist revivals in the context of a society where Methodism had become the cultural norm.²¹ Chapter 7 reprints an older contribution of 1982 which recounts the positive and competitive opposition offered by Methodism to potential political activism. Methodism provided positive opposition by being locked into pre-existing popular beliefs and folk superstitions and competitive opposition by underpinning the mass teetotal movement which swept through Cornwall after 1839. While teetotalism in Cornwall awaits its historian, Rule’s view of popular Methodism as an example of an older folk tradition might be usefully contrasted with David Luker’s work which explained it in terms of a combination of the old and new, bridging the community values of moral economy eighteenth century Cornwall and the individualism that spread in the nineteenth.²²

The chapters in this book therefore provide an accessible restatement of John Rule’s conclusions about the social life of Cornish mining communities in their heyday. However, from a broader Cornish history perspective, we might pinpoint a number of problems with this approach. Detailing these allows us to discern the outlines of a future research agenda for Cornish social history.

Limitations of the thesis

Qualifications relating to the arguments that surface in this collection of essays can be grouped as involving interlinked issues of content, context and comparison. In terms of content, and purely on an empirical level, both the definition and the details of the ‘configuration of quietism’ might be questioned. John Rule graciously acknowledges in the introductory chapter earlier doubts expressed about this concept.²³ But even if we were to accept the notion of ‘quietism’ for a moment, room for debate remains over the relative importance of the proposed factors. Chapter 5 of *Cornish Cases* for example calls for more research on the ‘mixed economy of welfare’ in the nineteenth century, on savings, charity and the strategies families adopted to cope with

misfortune. In particular, the role of collateral aids in Cornish mining districts – smallholdings, potato patches, access to fishing boats – may be more critical than previously thought.²⁴ Here, more comparative work involving the social experience of Cornish miners in the New World mining frontiers would seem worth the investment. Despite the presence of tributing and Methodism for example, Cornish workers in South Australia seemed willing to both establish trade unions and take energetic strike action when needed.²⁵ Was the presence or absence of the collateral aids along with the dense social relations that girdled and penetrated the older Cornish communities in the west of Cornwall the key factor?

Turning to context, a second line of attack echoes those wider criticisms levelled against the traditional British social history more generally; the concern with labour and class consciousness limits the breadth of issues that the social historian studies. John Rule is clearly aware of this and concedes the point.²⁶ But if social and cultural history has moved beyond its earlier narrower concern with class and class consciousness then the bulk of the work collected here should more strictly be seen as of valuable historiographical interest, charting a particular approach to Cornish social history, rather than being an exemplar of what that social history might entail. For instance, issues of the chronology of change in Cornish communities and the genesis of the distinct occupational communities studied here could repay further investigation.²⁷ How for example did the shift occur from the miners in 1839 who did not know the difference between a Chartist and a pilchard or mackerel to those newly enfranchised miners in 1885 who demonstrated a keen interest in politics and who were hailed as one of the most democratic communities in the British Isles?²⁸

We can sometimes underplay or ignore aspects that do not fit our preconceived frameworks. Chapter 8 in this book reminds us of the existence of small town radicalism in Cornwall through an account of John Spurr's activities in the 1830s. Spurr was a vociferous cabinet maker who led opposition in Truro to the town's conservative elite, unthinking supporters of established church and local landlords. Spurr had had enough of things by 1839 and left for London, eventually emigrating to Australia in 1850. But his voice was not the only note of political dissent in the towns of west Cornwall as the survival of Chartist activity in Camborne, Falmouth, Hayle, Helston, Penzance and Truro in the 1840s hints at.²⁹ Furthermore, even in mining communities, there is now more evidence of the presence of institutions associated with a modern class society than was available in 1971. For example, when discussing the wage system in a chapter originally published in 1997 John Rule writes that 'miners lacked the experience of the independent mutual funds, which played a clear role in the development of artisan trade unions'. However, in the next chapter, published first in 2001, Rule reports research that concludes that friendly society membership in Cornwall was 'more common than has been assumed'.³⁰ Friendly society membership at the beginning of the nineteenth century was both relatively high when compared with other regions and concentrated in mining parishes.

This type of evidence serves to chip away at the quietist thesis. That thesis can be subjected to more doubts if we move away from the mining communities and do more to compare them with others, both in Cornwall and further afield. John Rule insists that miners made up a distinct occupational community in Cornwall but this claim cries out for some close exploration of the boundaries between mining and other occupational groups in the nineteenth century, for example through reconstituting life

histories, examining afresh the issue of dual or multiple occupations or investigating marriage patterns. Even at its height in 1861 mining did not employ just over two thirds of the Cornish workforce. While many of these would have been economically dependent on the fortunes of the mines this still suggests that at least half of Cornish people were not inhabiting communities dominated by mining. Just as the political attitudes of miners need to be studied alongside political attitudes of craftsmen and artisans and other town dwellers, so the patterns of life in mining communities need comparing with those in market towns or in other rural communities that were occupationally less homogenous, or if homogenous, populated by families engaged in farming or fishing. In this volume Rule provides an example of this wider field in chapter 11 which is a straightforward economic history of the fishing industry in Cornwall and Devon.

In short, there needs to be more holistic work which can draw the conclusions from John Rule's social history together with the research of other scholars such as Ed Jaggard on the political life of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Cornwall.³¹ Furthermore, a more holistic approach could be allied with a more comparative approach. Explicit comparisons are required with coal mining communities in the rest of Britain and with metal mining communities in the north of England and overseas before we can reach confident conclusions about the uniqueness of Cornish mining communities.

Towards a new Cornish social history

John Rule is actually well aware of the limitations of the work on the social history of Cornwall and makes incisive calls in the introduction to *Cornish Cases* for more research and more writing on the social history of the period after the sixteenth century. One under-worked lode is the demographic history of seventeenth and eighteenth century Cornwall. It is noticeable that family reconstruction work on Cornish parishes is absent from the major accounts of demographic change that have issued from the Cambridge Group on population.³² Yet in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries it appears that Hundreds in the west were growing rapidly at a time when population in England and Wales was stagnating.³³ The mechanism of this calls for research and Rule suggests the possibility of parish register studies in this period and also more comparative work on rates of illegitimacy, bridal pregnancy and patterns of mortality in the critical eighteenth century when communities in Cornwall were amongst the first to experience the traumas and opportunities of the social changes accompanying industrialisation.

The last chapter in the book, the most recently written and one previously unpublished, is in many ways the most interesting. Chapter 12 is a study of gender and feasting in the nineteenth century based on the evidence of the Cornish drolls collected by Bottrell and Hunt. In a fascinating account of representations of feast days in these folk stories John Rule draws out how Feast Day had changed by the mid-nineteenth century. When gentry patronage and its 'carnavalesque' aspects declined, the Feast meal became the domestic centre of celebration. As its functions changed Feast Day had a concomitant gendered effect as the women of the parish played a central role in the success or failure of this domestic self-provisioning. This chapter opens up a whole area of research into the texture of everyday life in nineteenth century Cornwall which is present largely untapped and is a striking example of what a social history sensitive to textual evidence can achieve.

Furthermore, in the introduction we read of what might have been. John Rule's intention was to write an over-arching monograph of Cornish mining and fishing communities. This would have combined the history of these communities and extended the boundaries of the new Cornish history, in the process meeting the criticisms raised here concerning context and comparison. Regrettably, illness has cut this project short. Nonetheless, the concluding sentences of the final pages in this book, at the end of some very useful 'Bibliographical and Historiographical Notes', repeat John Rule's confidence that a substantial corpus of sources exist from which to write an ethnographic study of this period.³⁴ All that is required are the historians of sufficient imagination to meet the challenge he sets.

Cornish Cases thus provides a signpost for the future direction of the new Cornish history. I have already argued that the 'new Cornish historiography' is yoked too closely to the new British History.³⁵ The latter is fundamentally about the process of state formation, escaping nation-centred approaches in order to examine the relations between the different peoples of the British 'archipelago'. The new British history claims to look for common trends and experiences and is distinguished from national histories which focus on the making of nations.³⁶ But precisely because of its focus on state formation that produced a state centred on London and the south east margins of the archipelago the new British history has come under attack from Irish and Scottish historians as merely a continuation of the old anglocentric history and for over-emphasising similarities at the expense of difference.³⁷ There is also still little evidence that the new British history is giving the Cornish experience any more than token space.³⁸

In any case, the new British history, because of its concentration on one period of the past to the exclusion of others, is too restrictive and confined in its topics of interest to accommodate Cornish history. The paradox is that Cornish history is much more than British history. The experience of the diaspora for example links it to the project known as Atlantic history.³⁹ From this perspective the events of 1549 for example might make more, or different, sense by being set in a context of that expanding marchland of European 'civilisation' which, moving out of its core regions, engaged in savage and authorized brutality to impose itself on native peoples. The slaughters of 1549 in Cornwall (and Devon) could then be contextualised by comparison with those in that other Atlantic frontier across the Celtic Sea – Ireland – in the seventeenth – and the Americas from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Cornwall's location at the southern littoral of the Celtic Sea also reminds us that there have been long-lasting maritime links southwards as well as northwards, also generating experiences that may owe little to British state formation.

If the new British history is too meagre a canvas on which to paint the new Cornish history, then how do we enlarge it? Here, the trajectory of British social history offers a revealing model. It is now generally accepted that traditional social history in Britain was over-concerned with a single identity – that of class. Class is now viewed as one amongst a number of multiple identities with which in different times and in different contexts people in Britain have identified. Cornish history too has been over-concerned with a single identity - that of ethnicity. While understandable in view of the persistent ignorance and occasional patronising disdain that still besets some English academics on being confronted by Cornwall, it is time to move to the multiple

identities of Cornwall both contemporary and historic. Amongst these ethnicity will remain as an at times important identity but will not necessarily be *primus inter pares*.⁴⁰

In this search for multiple Cornwalls and a diversity of experience we begin to mirror John Rule's path away from a focus on mining communities alone to an all-encompassing ethnographic history. The addition of a variety of different methods – ethnographic, quantitative, textual – and a plethora of topics will achieve two further goals. First, it will bridge the gap between the 'theoretically led historical inquiry' that has been the hallmark of the new Cornish history and the ethnographic studies of Cornish cultural life that Amy Hale eloquently called for in 2002. By providing the new Cornish history with a variety of methods it will also, secondly, meet the suggestion of Malcolm Williams that Cornish Studies involves a deliberate 'triangulation' of methods, not confining itself to one or two approaches but seeking new angles on old subjects.⁴¹

I have argued here that John Rule's book may only tangentially be included as part of the 'new Cornish historiography', unlike Mark Stoye's *West Britons*. This is partly because of John's suspicions of the normative project of Cornish Studies but also because most of the essays in the book predate the 'new Cornish historiography' and are examples of a parallel historiography with different roots. However, it may well offer a better road map for the future of the new Cornish history. It is certainly a worthy addition to the corpus of literature on the social experience of the Cornish in past times, admirably succeeding in rescuing the Cornish labouring communities of the industrial period from the 'enormous condescension of posterity'. For that reason alone it deserves to be on the bookshelves of anyone with a serious interest in Cornish history.

- ¹ Mark Stoyale, *West Britons: Cornish Identities and the Early Modern British State*, Exeter, 2002. Philip Payton, *Introduction* in Philip Payton (ed.), *Cornish Studies Ten*, Exeter, 2002, p.11.
- ² John Rule, 'The labouring miner in Cornwall c1740-1870' unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1971.
- ³ The same applies to Gill Burke's thesis on the Cornish miner in the later period – Gill Burke, 'The Cornish miner and the Cornish mining industry 1870-1921', unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1981. Together, these two dissertations provide the raw material for a comprehensive social history of Cornish mining communities but this material has not yet been fully quarried.
- ⁴ John Rule, *Cornish Cases: Essays in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Social History*, Southampton, 2006, p.vii.
- ⁵ Philip Payton, 'Introduction' in Philip Payton (ed.), *Cornish Studies One*, Exeter, 1993, pp. 2-3
- ⁶ For this definition of the aims of the 'new Cornish historiography' see Philip Payton, 'Cornwall in context: the new Cornish historiography' in Philip Payton (ed.), *Cornish Studies Five*, Exeter, 1997, pp. 9-20.
- ⁷ Rule, 2006, p.viii.
- ⁸ Rule, 2006, p.17. Here, he explicitly rejects the application of the concept of proto-industrialisation to Cornwall, on the grounds that this concept should include a demographic dimension through stimulating population growth. However, this is at odds with other definitions of proto-industrialisation (see for example Steven King and Geoffrey Timmins, *Making Sense of the Industrial Revolution: English economy and society 1700-1850*, Manchester, 2001, pp.39-41.) By the criteria offered in King and Timmins Cornish mining certainly qualifies as proto-industrial. Even were we to demand that it stimulated higher fertility then there is other work that strongly suggest it had exactly this effect in the far west of Cornwall in the late seventeenth century – see David Cullum, 'Society and economy in west Cornwall, c1588-1750', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 1993, pp. 285-88 and Jonathan Barry, 'Population distribution and growth in the early modern period' in Roger Kain and William Ravenhill (eds), *The Historical Atlas of South West England*, Exeter, 1999, pp. 110-17.
- ⁹ For example Bernard Deacon, 'The new Cornish Studies: new discipline or rhetorically defined space?' in Philip Payton (ed.), *Cornish Studies Ten*, Exeter, 2002, pp.34-36 or Bob Keys and Garry Tregidga, 'Past, present and future: A review of Cornish historical studies', *Cornish History*, 2002 (online journal accessible at www.marjon.ac.uk/cornish-history).
- ¹⁰ Deacon 2002. For micro-history see Pat Hudson, 'Industrialization in Britain: the challenge of micro-history', *Family & Community History* 2, 1999, pp. 5-16 and for an excellent example of micro-history in practice Barry Reay, *Microhistories: demography, society and culture in rural England, 1800-1930*, Cambridge, 1996.
- ¹¹ Deacon, 2002.
- ¹² For example Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society*, London, 1969.
- ¹³ For the best account of this see John Host, *Victorian Labour History: Experience, identity and the politics of representation*, London, 1998, pp. 8-59.
- ¹⁴ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History, 1832-1982*, Cambridge, 1983; Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 1-7; James Vernon, 'Who's afraid of the "linguistic turn"? The politics of social history and its discontents', *Social History* 19, 1994, pp.81-97.
- ¹⁵ For the defence of class see Bryan Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The reification of language and the writing of social history*, Philadelphia PA, 1990. For a flavour of the debate see the contributions in the journal *Social History* triggered by David Mayfield and Susan Thorne, 'Social history and its discontents: Gareth Stedman Jones and the politics of language', *Social History* 17, 1992, pp.165-88.
- ¹⁶ Cited in Andrew August, *The British Working Class 1832-1940*, Harlow, 2007, p.1.
- ¹⁷ August, 2007; Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, *the Future of Class History: What's Left of the Social?*, Ann Arbor MI, 2007.
- ¹⁸ The books that established his reputation were *the Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England 1750-1850*, London, 1986; *The Vital Century: England's developing economy, 1714-1815*, London, 1992; *Albion's People: English Society 1714-1815*, London, 1992.
- ¹⁹ See also the historiographical notes at the end of Rule, 2006, p.291.
- ²⁰ Rule, 2006, p.104.
- ²¹ David Luker, 'Revivalism in theory and practice: The case of Cornish Methodism', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 37, 1986, pp. 603-19.
- ²² Unfortunately, Luker's important and comprehensive history of the growth of Methodism in Cornwall is only available in his thesis – 'Cornish Methodism, revivalism and popular belief, c.1780-1870', unpublished DLitt thesis, University of Oxford, 1987.
- ²³ For these see Bernard Deacon, 'In search of the missing "turn": the spatial dimension and Cornish Studies' in Philip Payton (ed.), *Cornish Studies Eight*, Exeter, 2000, pp. 219-21 and Bernard Deacon, 'the reformulation of territorial identity: Cornwall in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', unpublished PhD thesis, Open University, 2001, pp. 238-41.
- ²⁴ See Damaris Rose, 'Home ownership, subsistence and historical change: The mining district of West Cornwall in the late nineteenth century' in Nigel Thrift and Peter Williams (eds), *Class and Space: the making of an urban society*, London, 1987, pp.108-53; Deacon, 2001, pp.249-56; Peter Tremewan in this volume.
- ²⁵ Philip Payton, *Making Moonta: The Invention of Australia's Little Cornwall*, Exeter, 2007, pp.97-129.
- ²⁶ Rule, 2006, p.15.

- ²⁷ For a suggested revision of the received chronology of nineteenth century Cornish history see Bernard Deacon, 'Proto-industrialization and potatoes: a revised narrative for nineteenth-century Cornwall' in Philip Payton (ed.), *Cornish Studies Five*, Exeter, 1997, pp.60-84.
- ²⁸ For the fish reference see Rule, 2006, p.208. For the political culture of the central mining district in 1885 see Bernard Deacon, "'Conybeare for ever!'" in Terry Knight (ed.), *Old Redruth: Original Studies of the Town's History*, 1992, pp. 37-43.
- ²⁹ Rule, 2006, p.219.
- ³⁰ Rule, 2006, p.105. For the distribution of friendly societies see Martin Gorsky, 'The growth and distribution of English friendly societies in the early nineteenth century', *Economic History Review* 51, 1998, pp.489-511. Cornwall also had a more than its fair share of the first wave of cooperative societies in the 1850s - see Deacon, 2001, p.265.
- ³¹ Edwin Jaggard, *Cornwall Politics in the Age of Reform 1790—1885*, Woodbridge, 1999.
- ³² Edward Wrigley and Roger Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction*, Cambridge, 1989, pp.40-42.
- ³³ Cullum, 1993; Barry, 1999.
- ³⁴ Rule, 2006, p.294.
- ³⁵ Deacon, 2002, p.37.
- ³⁶ Steven Ellis, *The Making of the British Isles: the State of Britain and Ireland 1450-1660*, Harlow, 2007, pp.xvi-xix.
- ³⁷ Murray Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image*, Manchester, 1999, pp.98-100; Nicholas Canny, 'The attempted anglicization of Ireland in the seventeenth century: an exemplar of "British history"' in Ronald Asch (ed.), *Three Nations – a common history? England, Scotland, Ireland and British history c.1600-1920*, Bochum, 1993, pp. 49-50.
- ³⁸ See the references to Cornwall in Ellis, 2007. Here the index entry is 'Cornwall and Devon' and the Cornish are not described as one of the peoples of the British archipelago.
- ³⁹ Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours*, Cambridge MA, 2005.
- ⁴⁰ This repeats my call in Deacon, 2002 to move from a study of Cornwall to a study of Cornwalls.
- ⁴¹ Amy Hale, 'Cornish Studies and Cornish culture(s): Valuations and directions' in Philip Payton (ed.), *Cornish Studies Ten*, Exeter, 2002, pp. 240-51; Malcolm Williams, in Philip Payton (ed.), *Cornish Studies Eleven*, Exeter, 2003,